HERODIAS
THE STORY OF SALOME

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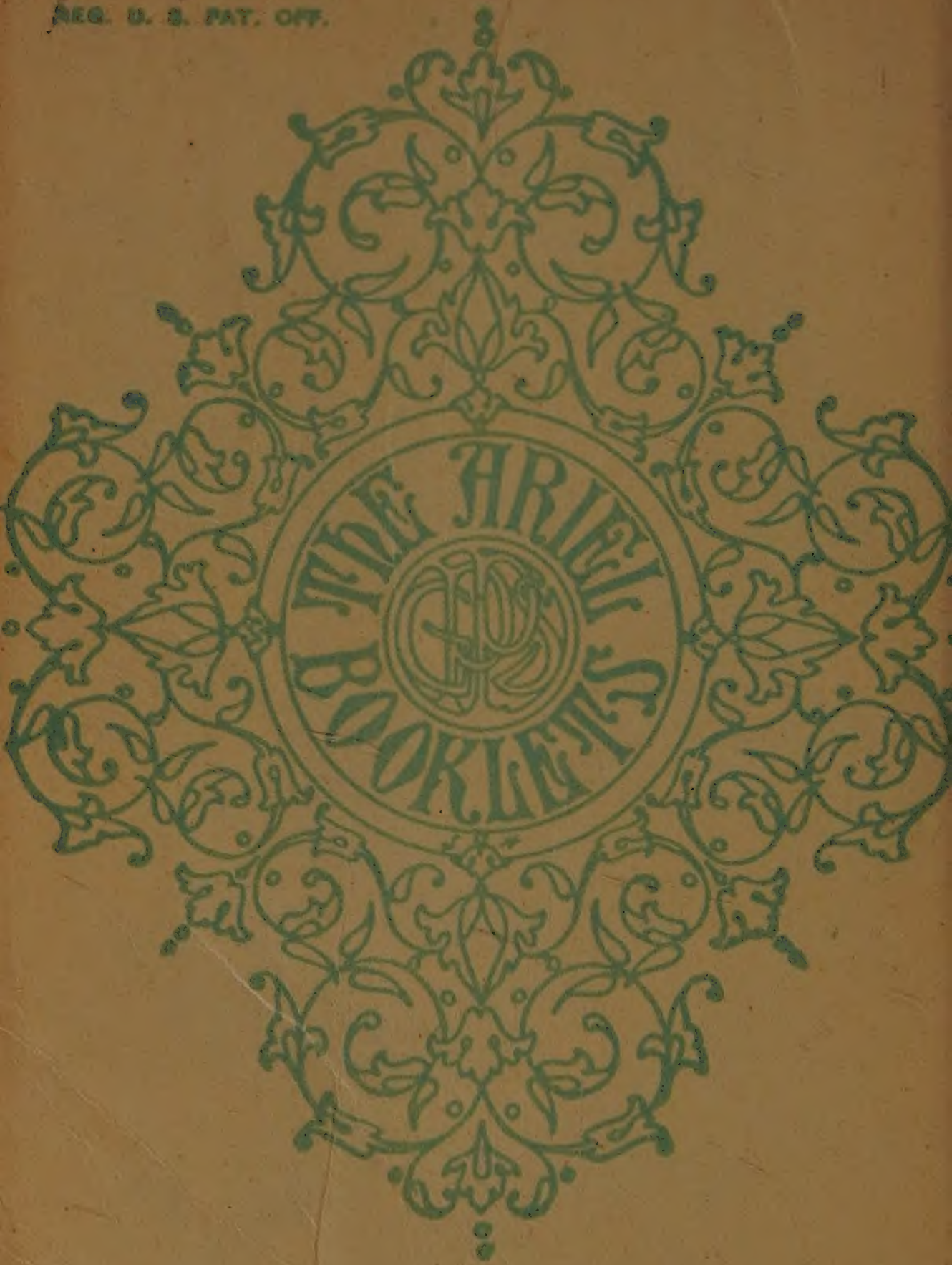

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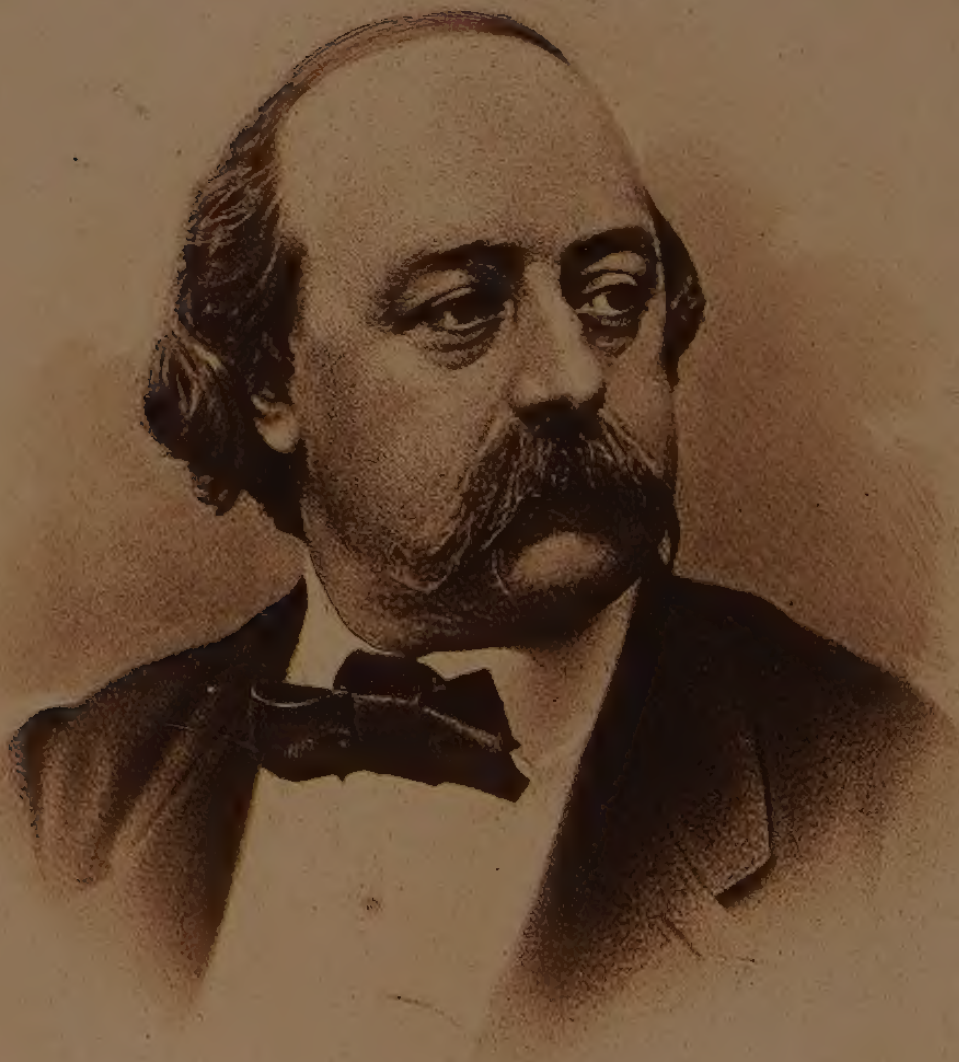

Herodias

By

Gustave Flaubert

With an Introduction by

Frank Thomas Marzials

New York and London

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Introduction

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

(1821–1880)

IN 1876 George Sand, having long sown Heaven knows what wild oats, had become a good, kind, motherly old woman of genius; and among those who poured their sorrows into her large heart was Gustave Flaubert. Writing to her on a certain Sunday evening in that year, he said: "After finishing my short story, I shall start another; for I am too much shaken to set myself to any great work."

Too much shaken! Flaubert came into the world at Rouen on the 12th of December, 1821, and had, therefore, in

1876, attained to the age of fifty-five, and few men probably have ever lived that number of years without receiving some pretty shrewd knocks at the hands of Fate. But apart from his general liability to the blows that afflict mankind, it can scarcely be said that he had been mauled out of measure. It is true he suffered at a comparatively early age, and almost through life, from some sort of epileptic seizure. And it is also true that the government of Napoleon III.—itself such a model of purity!—had prosecuted him as a writer of more than questionable morals, on the publication of his first book, *Madame Bovary*. Again, notwithstanding an immense contempt for politics, he had felt, through his inmost being, the sufferings and disasters of France in the "Terrible Year." Later,—shortly, indeed, before

the date at which he wrote, as quoted above, to George Sand—he had greatly compromised his private fortune, nearly ruined himself in trying to help the husband of his niece. And, if we wish to complete the tale of his misfortunes, it may be added that his literary work was produced with immense labour and sweat of brain.

But, after all, this is not such a terrible list. And how much there is to set on the other side! Nay, of the troubles enumerated, two at least were as clouds with the lining of silver. Had it not been for the epileptic fits, he would scarcely have induced his medical father, who had a fine contempt for letters, to allow him to devote his life to the writing of fiction. The government prosecution—though, to his credit be it spoken, the thought conveyed no com-

fort—yet proved the most excellent of advertisements. Even the crippling of his means, though undeniably a heavy blow, yet was not sufficient to alter the settled habits of his life, and drive him from the home he loved. To the end he occupied the great bare room, overlooking the Seine, where he had been wont to battle, hour after hour, against every rebellious part of speech, and when elated by victory, to roar out his sonorous periods to the echoing walls. And if at times his toil seemed almost unendurable, most certainly it also brought pleasure.

No, taking a general view, and except in one particular to which I shall presently revert, it cannot be said that the Fates had dealt unkindly with this individual mortal. He possessed, almost to the last, means amply propor-

tioned to his wants. He had leisure, undeterred by family or social claims, to devote himself to the one absorbing passion of his life, the art of prose composition. There was neither need nor temptation to pander, in the slightest or most excusable degree, to the public taste. He could altogether afford to disregard popularity. And yet from the very first fame was his. *Madame Bovary* (1857), had no sooner appeared than it "numbered good intellects," and his prosecution brought him, as it were, upon the European stage. His name was on every tongue.

Salammbô (1862) might be voted a work of labour and oppressive, but no one could deny its immense power and erudition. Sainte-Beuve, the almost unquestioned king among the French critics of the day, devoted to these

books, as they came out, two of his masterly articles, the *causerie* dealing with *Salammbô* being specially full and elaborate. If *Sentimental Education* (1869) and *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (1876) did not add to his popularity, they in no wise impaired his credit as a writer. Among his friends were George Sand, Sainte-Beuve, Renan, Turgeneff, Dumas *fils*, Zola, Daudet, the Goncourts, and latterly his almost disciple, Maupassant. The younger "naturalist" generation, then in its heyday, looked up to him as its master. His physical infirmity never seems to have prevented him from enjoying the pleasures of life to the full. He mingled freely in such society as he cared to cultivate. He travelled in the East; went, as a preparation for the composition of *Salammbô*, over the ground where

Carthage had once stood. Altogether, he lived, like him of Cawdor, "a prosperous gentleman."

What then were the fatal gifts which the wicked fairy not invited to the christening had foisted upon Flaubert? What drop had she poured into his cup of life to make it bitter? Misanthropy, or not perhaps so much pure hatred of mankind as a terrible love for studying the seamy side of human nature. Stupidity, dulness, had for him an immense attraction. He never wearied in the contemplation of the unimportant. He gloated over things base. His repulsion took the morbid form of lingering over its object, turning it over, examining it on this side and on that, regarding it with a fascination hideous and exclusive. To see nothing but evil and folly in the world is a depressing outlook. In the

hands of a master of prose, such curiosity may produce masterpieces; it can scarce conduce to personal happiness. It must become oppressive. When he wrote as, quoted above, to George Sand, he had been for some time at work upon the dreariest and most pessimistic of his works, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, and ransacked for the purpose all the archives of imbecility. The book was Flaubert's "revenge." "Of what," asks Maxime Ducamp, "had Flaubert to avenge himself?" "Personally of nothing," answers Mr. J. C. Tarver, Flaubert's biographer, "but in the name of knowledge and earnestness, of the levity and ignorance which take the chief places in the synagogue."

And now in weariness, he turned from his great task, ceased to hew at this monument in honour of ineptitude. He

felt, for a time at least, that he was capable only of grappling with short stories, and stories of a kind less withered.

The inspiration was a happy one. As Mr. Tarver rightly says: "It is much to be regretted that Flaubert did not discover the short prose story earlier in life; for it is the form best suited to his peculiar powers. It represses automatically his worst fault, his tendency to be drawn away from his main subject by side issues, and to overload his plot with details interesting and amusing in themselves, but not necessary to the development of the subject, or illustrative of it by contrast; it demands accuracy and refinement of workmanship, exactly suiting the cadenced prose of which Flaubert was enamoured; while its special weakness, its tendency to en-

courage the appeal to the emotions rather than to the intellect, was the one literary pitfall into which Flaubert was physically incapable of straying."

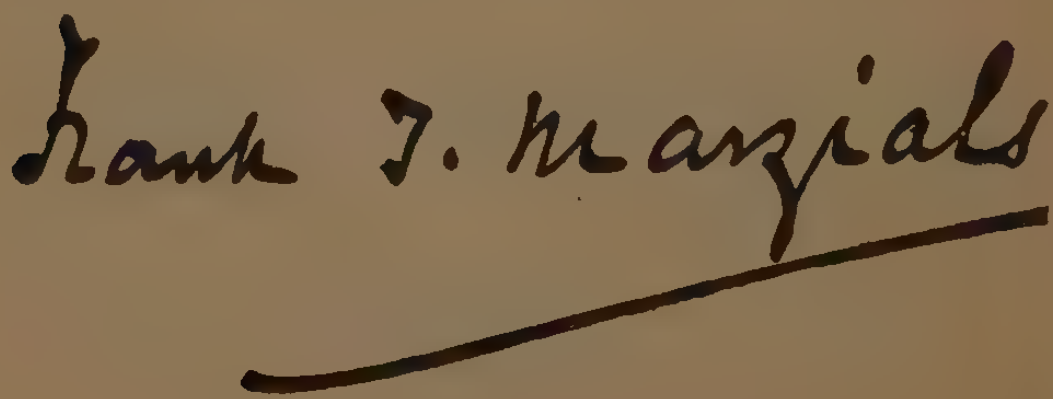
This is no exaggeration. The story contained in the present volume ranks with the finest of his work. *Herodias* has the gorgeousness, the barbaric colours, and the horror of *Salammbô*.

Herod Antipas, Herodias herself, her daughter Salome the dancer, Vitellius, the governor of Syria, his son Aulus the loathsome belly-god, and the prophet Iaokanann—these are the protagonists. Around them throng the Roman and the Jew. The scene is the rock fortress of Machærus, overlooking the Dead Sea, the deserts and hills of Judea the palms of Jericho, the Jordan flowing through a plain burnt to ashes, arid, as white as snow. The lake is like lapis

lazuli; the sky one great blue glare; all the landscape palpitates with fierce heat. The human passions, greed, cruelty, revenge, lust, fanaticism,—they too are at fever heat, molten. In the midst of that bestial crew the voice of the Baptist breaks grave and terrible as the clarion of judgment. Then the girl dances her strange dance, a dance to the Western eye rather grotesque than beautiful or even voluptuous—I speak almost as if the scene were before me, so vividly is it presented, all the more vividly, perhaps, from a certain brooding and suffocating want of space and atmosphere;—but the Oriental eye sees the dancing differently. She wins her odious guerdon. There is the leonine head, hacked and ghastly and dripping blood, upon the charger. At dawn two of the prophet's disciples, the two whom he had

despatched to ask if Jesus were the very Christ, and one of the Essenes, take the terrible object from among the relics of the orgy, and bear it towards Galilee. "As it was very heavy, they carried it each in turn [*alternativement*]."

This story has in it that which is in man's work not common, an originality striking, genuine, and yet excellent; it forms a part of the last book Flaubert lived to publish. On the 8th of May, 1880, apoplexy clubbed him down. He lies buried near the beautiful old city of his birth, not far from that room by the Seine where, like another Jacob, he had wrestled with his art until it blessed him.



Herodias

HERODIAS

I

THE citadel of Machærus stood on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, on a cone-shaped basaltic peak. Four deep valleys surrounded it, two on the sides, one in front, the fourth behind. Houses clustered about its base, within the enclosure formed by a wall which rose and fell with the undulations of the ground; and by a zigzag road, hewn in the rock, the town was connected with the fortress, whose walls were one hundred and twenty cubits high, with many angles, battlements on the edge, and here and there towers, forming the

ornamentation, as it were, of that crown of stone, suspended over the abyss.

Within there was a palace, adorned with porticoes and sheltered by a terrace, about which ran a balustrade of sycamore-wood, with tall poles arranged to hold a tent.

One morning, before dawn, the Tetrarch, Herod Antipas, leaned on the balustrade and looked forth.

Immediately beneath him the mountains were beginning to show their peaks, while their dense masses, to the lowest depths of the ravines, were still in shadow. The hovering mist was rent asunder, and the outlines of the Dead Sea appeared. The dawn, breaking behind Machærus, diffused a reddish light. Soon it illuminated the sands on the shore, the hills, the desert, and, farther away, all the mountains of Judea, with

their jagged grey slopes. En-Gedi, in the centre, formed a black bar; Hebron, in the background, was rounded like a dome; Eshtaol was covered with pomegranates, Sorek with vineyards, Carmel with fields of sesame; and the Tower of Antonia, with its monstrous cube, dominated Jerusalem. The Tetrarch turned his eyes to the right, to gaze upon the palm-trees of Jericho; and he thought of the other cities of his Galilee: Capernaum, Endor, Nazareth, Tiberias, whither perhaps he would never go again. Meanwhile the Jordan flowed through the barren plain. All white, it was as dazzling as a field of snow. Now the lake seemed to be of lapis lazuli; and at its southern point, in the direction of Yemen, Antipas saw what he dreaded to see. Brown tents were scattered here and there; men with lances went to and

fro among the horses; and dying fires gleamed like sparks, level with the ground.

They were the troops of the King of the Arabs, whose daughter he had cast aside to take Herodias, wife to one of his brothers, who lived in Italy with no pretension to power.

Antipas was awaiting succour from the Romans; and as Vitellius, Governor of Syria, did not appear, he was consumed with impatience.

Doubtless Agrippa had ruined him in the mind of the Emperor? Philip, his third brother, sovereign of Batanea, was secretly arming. The Jews would have no more of his idolatrous customs, nor all the rest of his domineering sway; so that he was hesitating between two plans: to beguile the Arabs, or to enter into an alliance with the Parthians; and,

on the pretext of celebrating his birthday, he had bidden to a great banquet, for that very day, the leaders of his troops, the stewards of his estates, and the chief men of Galilee. With a keen glance he scanned all the roads. They were empty. Eagles flew over his head; the soldiers were sleeping against the walls, along the rampart; nothing stirred within the castle.

Of a sudden a voice in the distance, as if escaping from the bowels of the earth, made the Tetrarch turn pale. He leaned forward to listen; it had ceased. It began again, and he clapped his hands and called:

"Mannæus! Mannæus!"

A man appeared, naked to the waist, like the masseurs at baths. He was very tall, aged, fleshless, and wore at his hip a cutlass in a copper sheath. His hair, brushed back and held in place by

a comb, exaggerated the height of his brow. His eyes were dull with drowsiness, but his teeth gleamed and his toes rested lightly on the flagstones, his whole body having the suppleness of a monkey and his face the impassiveness of a mummy.

"Where is he?" asked the Tetrarch.

Mannæus replied, pointing with his thumb to something behind them:

"There! still there!"

"I thought that I heard him!"

And Antipas, having drawn a long breath of relief, inquired concerning Iaokanann, the same man whom the Latins called St. John the Baptist. Had those two men been seen again who had been admitted as a favour to his dungeon some months before; and had the purpose with which they had come been learned since?

Mannæus replied:

"They exchanged some words with him in secret, like thieves at a cross-roads in the night. Then they went away towards Upper Galilee, announcing that they were the bearers of great tidings."

Antipas hung his head, then exclaimed in a tone of alarm:

"Keep him! keep him! And let no one enter! Lock the door fast! Cover the hole! None must ever suspect that he lives!"

Before receiving these orders Mannæus had carried them out; for Iaokanann was a Jew; and, like all Samaritans, he abhorred the Jews.

Their temple of Gerizim, intended by Moses to be the centre of Israel, had ceased to exist since the time of King Hyrcanus; and that of Jerusalem drove

them to frenzy as an outrage and a lasting injustice. Mannæus had made his way into it in order to sully the altar with dead men's bones. His confederates, less swift of foot than he, had been beheaded.

He saw it in the gap between two hills. Its white marble walls and the golden lines of its roof shone resplendent in the sun. It was like a luminous mountain—something superhuman, crushing all else by its magnificence and its pride.

Then he extended his arms towards Zion; and, standing erect, with head thrown back and fists clenched, he hurled a malediction at it, believing that words had real power.

Antipas listened and did not seem shocked.

The Samaritan continued:

"At times he becomes excited, he

longs to fly, he hopes for a rescue. At other times he has the tranquil aspect of a sick beast; or else I see him walking to and fro in the darkness, saying: 'What matters it? That He may grow great, I must needs shrink!' "

Antipas and Mannæus glanced at each other. But the Tetrarch was weary of reflection.

All those mountains about him, like terraces of huge petrified waves, the black ravines on the sides of the cliffs, the immensity of the blue vault, the brilliant glamour of the day, the depth of the abysses, disturbed him; and a wave of desolation swept over him at the spectacle of the desert, which, in the upheavals of its surface, formed amphitheatres and ruined palaces. The hot wind brought, with the odour of sulphur, an exhalation, as it were, from the

accursed cities, buried lower than the banks beneath the heavy waters of the lake. These tokens of an immortal wrath brought dismay to his mind; and he stood, with both elbows on the balustrade, staring eyes, and his hands pressed against his temples. Some one touched him. He turned. Herodias stood before him.

A light purple robe covered her to the sandals. Having come forth hurriedly from her chamber, she wore neither necklace nor ear-rings; a tress of her black hair fell over one arm, and its end was lost to sight between her breasts. Her two open nostrils throbbed; a joyous expression of triumph lighted up her face; and in a loud voice, shaking the Tetrarch's arm, she said:

"Cæsar loves us! Agrippa is in prison!"

"Who told you so?"

"I know it."

She added:

"It is for having aspired to Caius's[1] empire!"

While living on their alms, he had schemed to obtain the title of king, which they, like him, coveted. But in the future no more fear! "Tiberius's dungeons are hard to open, and sometimes life is not secure therein!"

Antipas understood her; and, although she was Agrippa's sister, her atrocious purpose seemed to him justified. Such murders were a consequence of the state of affairs, a fatality attached to royal families. In Herod's they had become too numerous to count.

Then she set forth her plan: clients bought, letters discovered, spies at

[1] The Emperor Caligula.—[Trans.]

every door; and how she had succeeded in seducing Eutyches the denouncer. "Nothing deterred me! Have I not done even more for you? I have abandoned my daughter!"

After her divorce she had left the child in Rome, hoping to have others by the Tetrarch. She never mentioned her. He wondered why that outburst of affection.

The tent had been spread, and huge cushions were speedily brought to them. Herodias sank upon them and wept, turning her head to him. Then she passed her hand over her eyes, said that she proposed to think no more about it, that she was happy; and she recalled to his mind their chats yonder in the atrium, their meetings at the baths, their strolls along the Via Sacra, and the evenings at the great villas, amid the plashing of

fountains, beneath arches of flowers, by the Roman Campagna. She gazed at him as of yore, rubbing against his breast, with cajoling gestures. He pushed her away. The love that she tried to kindle was so far away now! And all his misfortunes had flowed from it; for war had raged well-nigh twelve years. It had aged the Tetrarch. His shoulders were bent; in his sad-coloured toga with a violet border, his white hair blended with his beard, and the sun, shining through the veil, bathed with light his troubled brow. Herodias's too was wrinkled; and, seated face to face, they eyed each other fiercely.

The roads over the mountain began to be peopled. Herdsmen drove their cattle, children dragged donkeys along, grooms led horses. Those who descended the heights above Machærus

disappeared behind the castle; others ascended the ravine opposite, and, having reached the town, discharged their burdens in the court-yards. They were the Tetrarch's purveyors, and servants preceding his guests.

But, at the foot of the terrace, on the left, an Essene appeared, in a white robe, barefooted, with a stoical air. Mannæus, on the right, rushed forward, brandishing his cutlass.

"Kill him!" cried Herodias.

"Hold!" said the Tetrarch.

He stood still; the other did likewise.

Then they withdrew, each by a different stairway, walking backward, keeping their eyes fixed on each other.

"I know him!" said Herodias; "his name is Phanuel, and he seeks speech with Iaokanann, since you are blind enough to spare his life!"

Antipas suggested that he might some day be of use. His attacks upon Jerusalem would win to their side the rest of the Jews.

"No!" she said; "they accept all masters and are not capable of forming a fatherland!" As for him who stirred the people with hopes never lost since the days of Nehemiah, the best policy was to suppress him.

There was no need of haste in the Tetrarch's opinion. Iaokanann dangerous! Folly! he feigned to laugh at the idea.

"Hold your peace!" And she repeated the tale of her humiliation one day when she was going towards Gilead to gather balsam. People were putting on their clothes on the bank of a stream. On a low hill near by a man was speaking. He had a camel's skin about his loins, and

his head resembled a lion's. "As soon as he saw me he spit out at me all the maledictions of the prophets. His eyes shot fire; his voice roared; he raised his arms as if to tear the thunder from on high. Impossible to fly! the wheels of my chariot were buried in sand to the axles; and I drove away slowly, sheltering myself beneath my cloak, my blood congealed by those insults, which fell like a shower of rain."

Iaokanann made life impossible to her. When he was taken and bound with cords, the soldiers were ordered to stab him if he resisted; he was as gentle as a lamb. They had put serpents in his dungeon; they were dead.

The futility of these tricks drove Herodias mad. Besides, what was the cause of his war against her? What interest guided him? His harangues, de-

livered to crowds, were circulated, spread abroad; she heard them everywhere, they filled the air. Against legions she would have been stout of heart. But that power, more harmful than the sword, and intangible, was stupefying, and she paced the terrace, livid with wrath, lacking words to express the passion that suffocated her.

She reflected, too, that the Tetrarch, yielding to public opinion, would perhaps deem it best to cast her off. In that case all would be lost! From childhood she had cherished the dream of mighty empire. It was to attain it that, deserting her first husband, she had allied herself to this one, who, she thought, had deceived her.

"I obtained a powerful support when I entered your family!"

"It is equal to yours!" rejoined the Tetrarch, simply.

Herodias felt the blood of the priests and kings who were her ancestors boiling in her veins.

"But your grandfather swept the temple of Ascalon! The others were shepherds, bandits, heads of caravans, a wandering horde, subject to Judah from the time of King David! All my ancestors vanquished yours! The first of the Maccabees drove you forth from Hebron; Hyrcanus forced you to be circumcised!" And, giving vent to the patrician's scorn for the plebeian, Jacob's hatred of Edom,[1] she reproached him for his indifference to insults, for his mildness towards the Phœnicians, who betrayed him, his cowardly subservience to the people, who detested him. "You are

[1] Esau.—[Trans.]

like them, admit it! And you sigh for the Arab girl who danced around the stones! Take her! Go, live with her, in her canvas house! feed on her bread cooked in the ashes! drink the curdled milk of her sheep! kiss her blue cheeks! and forget me!"

The Tetrarch was no longer listening. He was gazing at the roof of a house, on which there was a young girl, and an old woman holding a parasol with a reed handle as long as a fisher's line. In the centre of the rug stood a great travelling-basket, open. Girdles, veils, jewels overflowed from it in a confused mass. Now and again the girl stooped towards those objects and shook them in the air. She was dressed like the Roman women, in a wrinkled tunic, with a peplum adorned with emerald tassels; and blue bands confined her hair which was doubtless

too heavy, for from time to time she put her hand to it. The shadow of the parasol hovered above her, half hiding her. Twice or thrice Antipas caught a glimpse of her shapely neck, the corner of an ear, or of a tiny mouth. But he saw her whole figure, from the hips to the neck, as she bent forward and drew herself up again with supple grace. He watched for the repetition of that movement, and his breath came faster; flames kindled in his eyes. Herodias observed him.

He asked: "Who is she?"

She answered that she had no knowledge, and left him, suddenly appeased.

The Tetrarch was awaited under the porticoes by the Galileans, the master of the writings, the chief of the pasturage, the director of the salt-wells, and a Jew of Babylon, in command of his horsemen. All hailed him with loud accla-

mations. Then he vanished towards the inner chambers.

Phanuel appeared at the angle of a passage.

"Ah! again? You came to see Iaokanann doubtless?"

"And you! I have to tell you something of moment."

And, following Antipas, he entered, at his heels, a dark apartment.

The light entered through a barred opening that extended along the wall under the cornice. The walls were painted a dark pomegranate colour, almost black. At the end stood an ebony bed, with cords of ox-hide. A golden buckler, above, gleamed like a sun.

Antipas walked the whole length of the room, and lay down on the bed.

Phanuel was standing. He raised his

arm, and said in the attitude of one inspired:

"The Most High sends one of his sons to earth now and again. Iaokanann is such an one. If you oppress him you will be punished."

"It is he who persecutes me!" cried Antipas. "He demanded of me an impossible act. Since then he has rent me. And I was not harsh at the beginning! He has even sent forth from Machærus men who overturn my provinces. A curse upon his life! Since he attacks me, I defend myself!"

"His fits of anger are too violent," replied Phanuel. "No matter! He must be set free."

"One does not set free raging beasts!" said the Tetrarch.

"Have no fear," the Essene replied. "He will go hence to the Arabs, the

Gauls, the Scythians. His work is destined to reach to the ends of the earth!"

Antipas seemed lost in a vision.

"His power is mighty! Against my will, I love him."

"Then let him be free!"

The Tetrarch shook his head. He feared Herodias, Mannæus, and the unknown.

Phanuel strove to persuade him, alleging as a guaranty of his plans the submission of the Essenes to the King. People respected those poor men, unconquerable by torture, always clad in flax, and able to read the future in the stars.

Antipas recalled the words he had let fall a moment before.

"What is this thing which you said was of moment?"

A negro appeared. His body was white with dust. He gasped for breath and could only say:

"Vitellius!"

"What! has he arrived?"

"I saw him. Within three hours he will be here!"

The portières at the doors of the corridors were separated as by the wind. A busy hum filled the castle, a tumult of people running to and fro, of furniture being dragged about, of silver plate falling to the floor; and from the towers trumpets sounded, to call the scattered slaves.

II

THE ramparts were thronged with people when Vitellius entered the court-yard. He was leaning on his interpreter's arm, followed by a great red

litter adorned with plumes and mirrors; he wore the toga, the laticlave, the buskins of a consul, and his person was surrounded by lictors.

They leaned against the door their twelve fasces—staves bound together by a strap, with an axe in the centre. Thereupon one and all trembled before the majesty of the Roman people.

The litter, borne by eight men, stopped. Then stepped forth a youth with a fat paunch, a blotched face, and pearls along his fingers. He was offered a glass of wine and spices. He drank it and demanded a second.

The Tetrarch had fallen at the Proconsul's feet, grieved, he said, that he had not been sooner informed of the favour of his presence. Otherwise he would have ordered that whatever the Vitellii might require should await them

along the roads. They were descended from the goddess Vitellia. A road leading from Janiculum to the sea still bore their name. Quæstorships and consulships were innumerable in the family; and as for Lucius, now his guest, they owed thanks to him as the conqueror of the Cliti and as the father of the young Aulus,[1] who seemed to be returning to his own domain, since the Orient was the fatherland of the gods.

These hyperbolical compliments were delivered in Latin. Vitellius accepted them impassively.

He replied that the great Herod sufficed to make a nation glorious. The Athenians had entrusted to him the management of the Olympic games. He had built temples in honour of Augustus, had been patient, ingenious,

[1] Afterwards the Emperor Vitellius.—[Trans.]

awe-inspiring, and always loyal to the Cæsars.

Between the pillars, with their brazen capitals, Herodias was seen, advancing with the air of an empress, amid women and eunuchs carrying burning perfumes on silver-gilt salvers.

The Proconsul took three steps to meet her; and, having saluted him with an inclination of the head:

"What joy!" she cried; "henceforth, Agrippa, the enemy of Tiberius, is powerless to do harm!"

He knew nothing of the event; it seemed to him perilous; and as Antipas swore that he would do everything for the Emperor, Vitellius added: "Even to the injury of others?"

He had taken hostages from the King of the Parthians, and the Emperor had forgotten it; for Antipas, being present

at the conference, to give himself importance, had instantly despatched the news. Hence a deep-rooted hatred, and delay in sending succour.

The Tetrarch stammered, but Aulus said, laughing:

"Fear not; I will protect you!"

The Proconsul pretended not to have heard. The father's fortune depended on the son's debasement; and that flower from the mire of Capræ procured him advantages so considerable that he encompassed it with attentions, distrusting it all the while because it was poisonous.

A tumult arose beneath the gate. A file of white mules was led in, ridden by persons in priestly costume. They were Sadducees and Pharisees, led to Machærus by the same object of ambition, the first wishing to obtain the honour-

able post of sacrificer, the others to retain it. Their faces were dark, especially those of the Pharisees, foes of Rome and of the Tetrarch. The skirts of their tunics embarrassed them in the press; and their tiaras rested insecurely on their brows, above bands of parchment, whereon words were written.

At almost the same time some soldiers of the vanguard arrived. They had placed their shields in bags, to protect them from the dust; and behind them was Marcellus, lieutenant to the Proconsul, with publicans carrying tablets of wood under their armpits.

Antipas named the principal persons of his suite: Tolmai, Kanthera, Sebon, Ammonius, of Alexandria, who bought asphalt for him, Naaman, captain of his velites, and Jacim the Babylonian.

Vitellius had observed Mannæus.

"Who is that man?"

The Tetrarch, with a gesture, gave him to understand that he was the executioner.

Then he presented the Sadducees.

Jonathas, a small man of free manners, speaking Greek, begged the master to honour them by a visit to Jerusalem.—He would probably go thither.

Eleazar, with hooked nose and long beard, demanded for the Pharisees the cloak of the high priest, detained in the Tower of Antonia by the civil authorities.

Then the Galileans denounced Pontius Pilate. Taking advantage of the act of a madman who was seeking David's vessel of gold in a cave near Samaria, he had killed some of the inhabitants. And they all spoke at once, Mannæus with more violence than the others.

Vitellius declared that the criminals should be punished.

Loud exclamations arose in front of a portico where the soldiers had hung their shields. The coverings being removed, there was seen on the bosses the image of Cæsar. That, to the Jews, was idolatry. Antipas harangued them, while Vitellius, from an elevated seat on the colonnade, looked on in amazement at their wrath. Tiberius had done well to banish four hundred of them to Sardinia. But at home they were strong; and he ordered the bucklers to be removed.

Thereupon they surrounded the Proconsul, imploring reparation for injustice, privileges, alms. Clothes were torn, they trampled upon one another; and, to make room, slaves struck right and left with staves. Those nearest the gateway went down to the road; others

ascended it; the tide flowed back; two currents met in that mass of men, which swayed back and forth, hemmed in by the encircling walls.

Vitellius asked why there were so many people. Antipas told him the reason: his birthday festival; and he pointed out several of his people, who leaned over the battlements, lowering enormous baskets of meat, fruit, vegetables, antelopes and storks, large sky-blue fish, grapes, melons, pomegranates arranged in pyramids. Aulus could not restrain himself. He rushed towards the kitchen, impelled by that gluttony which was destined to surprise the universe.

Passing a cave, he saw stew-pans like cuirasses. Vitellius came to look at them, and demanded that the underground rooms of the fortress should be opened for him.

They were hewn in the rock, with high vaulted roofs, and pillars at intervals. The first contained old armour, but the second was filled to overflowing with pikes, all their points protruding from a bouquet of plumes. The third seemed to be hung with mats of reeds, the slender arrows were arranged so straightly side by side. Scimitar-blades covered the walls of the fourth. In the centre of the fifth, rows of helmets, with their crests, formed as it were a battalion of red serpents. In the sixth naught could be seen save quivers; in the seventh, naught but military boots; in the eighth, naught but armlets; in those following, pitchforks, grappling-irons, ladders, ropes, and even poles for catapults, even bells for the breastplates of dromedaries! And as the mountain grew larger at its base, and was hollowed out within like

a beehive, beneath these rooms there were others more numerous and deeper.

Vitellius, Phineas his interpreter, and Sisenna, the leader of the publicans, walked through them by the light of torches borne by three eunuchs.

In the shadow they distinguished hideous objects invented by the barbarians: headcrushers studded with nails, javelins that poisoned the wounds they made, pincers resembling a crocodile's jaws; in a word, the Tetrarch had in store in Machærus munitions of war for forty thousand men.

He had gathered them in anticipation of an alliance of his enemies. But the Proconsul might believe, or say, that it was to fight against the Romans, and the Tetrarch sought explanations.

They were not his; many were used for protection against brigands; more-

over, they were needed against the Arabs; or else, they had all belonged to his father. And, instead of walking behind the Proconsul, he went before, at a rapid pace. Then he stood against the wall, which he covered with his toga, holding his elbows away from his sides; but the top of a door appeared above his head. Vitellius noticed it and wished to know what was on the other side.

The Babylonian alone could open it.

"Call the Babylonian!"

They awaited his coming.

His father had come from the shores of the Euphrates, to offer his services to Herod the Great, with four hundred horsemen, to defend the eastern frontier. After the partition of the kingdom, Jacim had remained in Philip's service, and now served Antipas.

He appeared, with a bow over his

shoulder, a whip in his hand. Cords of many colours were tied tightly about his crooked legs. His huge arms emerged from a sleeveless tunic, and a fur cap cast its shadow over his face, which bore a beard curled in rings.

At first he seemed not to understand the interpreter. But Vitellius cast a glance at Antipas, who instantly repeated his command. Thereupon Jacim placed both his hands against the door. It glided into the wall.

A breath of hot air came forth from the darkness. A winding path sloped downward; they followed it and reached the entrance to a grotto, of greater extent than the other underground apartments.

At the rear there was an arched opening over the precipice, which defended the citadel on that side. The blossoms

of a honeysuckle that clung to the wall hung downward in the bright light of day. Along the ground trickled a murmuring thread of water.

There were white horses there, a hundred perhaps, eating barley from a board on a level with their mouths. All had their manes painted blue, their hoofs in bags of esparto, and the hair between the ears curled over the frontal bone, like a wig. With their very long tails they lazily lashed their legs. The Proconsul was struck dumb with admiration.

They were marvellous creatures, supple as serpents, light as birds. They would keep pace with their riders' arrows, overturn men and bite them in the abdomen, traverse the mountainous country with ease, leap ravines, and continue their wild gallop over the level

ground through a whole day. A word would stop them. As soon as Jacim entered, they went to him, like sheep when the shepherd appears; and, stretching out their necks, gazed at him restlessly with their childlike eyes. From habit, he uttered a hoarse cry from the bottom of his throat, which aroused their spirits; and they reared, hungry for space, begging leave to run.

Antipas, fearing that Vitellius might take them, had imprisoned them in that place, specially designed for animals in case of siege.

"It is a bad stable," said the Proconsul, "and you run the risk of losing them! Count them, Sisenna!"

The publican took a tablet from his girdle, counted the horses and wrote the number.

The agents of the fiscal companies

bribed the provincial governors, in order to pillage the provinces. This one smelt everywhere, with his polecat's jaw and his blinking eyes.

At last they went up again to the court-yard.

Bronze shields, set in the pavement here and there, covered the cisterns. He noticed one larger than the rest, which had not their sonority beneath the feet. He struck them all in turn, then shouted, stamping:

"I have it! I have it! Herod's treasure is here!"

The search for his treasure was a mania among the Romans.

It did not exist, the Tetrarch swore.

But what was there beneath?

"Nothing! a man, a prisoner."

"Show him to me!" said Vitellius.

The Tetrarch did not obey; the

Jews would have learned his secret. His disinclination to raise the shield angered Vitellius.

"Break it in!" he shouted to the lictors.

Mannæus had divined what was happening. Seeing an axe, he thought that they were going to behead Iaokanann—and he stopped the lictor at the first blow on the bronze circle, inserted a sort of hook between it and the pavement, then, straightening his long, thin arms, slowly raised it; it opened, and all marvelled at the old man's strength. Beneath the wood-lined cover was a trap-door of the same dimensions. At a blow of the fist it folded in two panels; then they saw a hole, a great ditch, surrounded by a staircase without a rail; and they who leaned over the brink saw at

the bottom something indistinct and horrifying.

A human being lay on the ground, covered with long hair that mingled with the beast's hair that clothed his back. He rose; his brow touched a horizontal grating; and from time to time he disappeared in the depths of his den.

The sun gleamed on the points of the tiaras and on the sword-hilts, and heated the flagstones beyond measure; and doves, flying from the eaves, fluttered above the court-yard. It was the hour when Mannæus usually threw grain to them. He crouched before the Tetrarch, who stood beside Vitellius. The Galileans, the priests, the soldiers, formed a circle behind them; all held their peace, in agonising suspense as to what was about to happen.

First there was a profound sigh, uttered in a cavernous voice.

Herodias heard it at the other end of the palace. Overcome by a sort of fascination, she passed through the crowd; and with one hand on Mannæus's shoulder, and body bent forward, she listened.

The voice arose.

"Woe to you, Pharisees and Sadducees, generation of vipers, inflated skins, tinkling cymbals!"

They recognised Iaokanann. His name passed from mouth to mouth. Others hastened to the spot.

"Woe to you, O people! woe to the traitors of Judah, to the drunkards of Ephraim, to those who dwell in the fat valleys and who are overcome with wine!

"Let them fade away like the water

that flows, like the snail that melts as it crawls, like the fœtus of a woman who does not see the sun.

"Thou must take refuge, O Moab, among the cypresses like the sparrows, in caverns like the jerboa. The gates of the fortresses shall be rent asunder more easily than nutshells, walls shall crumble, cities shall burn; and the scourge of the Eternal shall not rest. He shall turn your limbs about in your blood as wool is turned in the dyer's vat. He shall tear you like a new harrow; He shall scatter morsels of your flesh upon the mountains!"

Of what conqueror was he speaking? Was it of Vitellius? The Romans alone could effect such an extermination. Complaints arose:

"Enough! enough! let him finish!"

He continued, in a louder voice:

"Beside their mothers' dead bodies, little children shall drag themselves through the dust. You shall go at night to seek bread among the ruins, at the risk of sword thrusts. The jackals shall fight for your bones on the public squares, where the old men used to talk at evening. Your virgins, swallowing their tears, shall play the lute at the stranger's feasts, and your bravest sons shall bend their backs, crushed by too heavy burdens!"

The people remembered their days of exile, all the calamities of their history. These were the words of the prophets of old. Iaokanann sent them forth, like mighty blows, one after another.

But the voice became sweet, melodious, musical. It proclaimed enfranchisement, splendid portents in the sky, the newly born, with an arm in the

dragon's cavern, gold instead of clay, the desert blooming like a rose. "That which is now worth sixty talents will not cost an obol. Fountains of milk shall gush from the rocks; you shall sleep in the wine-presses, with full bellies!—When wilt Thou come, whose coming I await? In anticipation, all the peoples kneel, and Thy sway shall be eternal, O Son of David!"

The Tetrarch threw himself back, the existence of a Son of David affronting him like a threat.

Iaokanann anathematised him for his assumption of royalty:—"There is no king save the Eternal!"—and for his gardens, his statues, his ivory furniture —like the impious Ahab!

Antipas broke the cord of the seal that hung upon his breast, and threw it into the hole, bidding him hold his peace.

The voice replied:

"I will cry aloud like the bear, like a wild ass, like a woman in labour!

"The punishment has already befallen thee in thy incest. God afflicts thee with the sterility of the mule."

And laughter arose, like the plashing of the waves.

Vitellius persisted in remaining. The interpreter, in an unmoved voice, repeated in the Roman tongue all the invectives that Iaokanann roared in his own. The Tetrarch and Herodias were forced to listen to them twice. He panted, while she, open-mouthed, watched the bottom of the hole.

The ghastly man threw back his head, and, grasping the bars, pressed against them his face, which had the aspect of a tangled underbrush, and in which two coals of fire beamed.

"Ah! it is thou, Jezebel!

"Thou dost take his heart captive with the creaking of thy shoes. Thou didst neigh like a mare. Thou didst set thy bed on the mountains, to accomplish thy sacrifices!

"The Lord shall tear away thine ear-rings, thy purple robes, thy veils of fine linen, the circlets from thine arms, the rings from thy feet; and the little golden crescents that tremble on thy brow, thy silver mirrors, thy fans of ostrich feathers, the mother-of-pearl pattens that increase thy stature, the pride of thy diamonds, the perfumes of thy hair, the painting of thy nails—all the artifices of sensuality; and the stones shall be too few to stone the adulteress!"

She glanced about her for protection. The Pharisees hypocritically lowered

their eyes. The Sadducees turned their faces away, fearing to offend the Pro-consul. Antipas seemed at the point of death.

The voice grew louder, took on new intonations, rolled hither and thither with a crashing as of thunder, and, repeated by the mountain echoes, struck Machærus with bolt after bolt.

"Stretch thyself in the dust, daughter of Babylon! Grind flour! Remove thy girdle, unloose thy shoes, truss up thy skirts, cross the rivers! Thy shame shall be laid bare, thine opprobrium shall be seen! thy sobs shall break thy teeth! The Eternal abhors the stench of thy crimes! Accursed! accursed! Die like a dog!"

The trap-door closed, the cover was lowered to its place. Mannæus wished to strangle Iaokanann.

Herodias vanished. The Pharisees were scandalised. Antipas, in their midst, defended himself.

"Doubtless," said Eleazar, "one may marry his brother's wife; but Herodias was not widowed, and, moreover, she had a child, wherein lay the abomination."

"Not so! not so!" objected Jonathas the Sadducee. "The Law condemns such marriages, without proscribing them absolutely."

"It matters not! They are most unjust to me!" said Antipas; "for Absalom lay with his father's wives, Judah with his daughter-in-law, Ammon with his sister, Lot with his daughters."

Aulus, who had been sleeping, reappeared at that moment. When he was informed of the affair, he took sides with the Tetrarch. He should not be

disturbed by such foolish ideas; and he laughed aloud at the reprobation of the priests and the frenzy of Iaokanann.

Herodias, on the steps, turned towards him.

"You are wrong, my master! He bids the people refuse to pay the tax."

"Is that true?" instantly asked the publican.

The answers were generally in the affirmative. The Tetrarch confirmed them.

Vitellius thought the prisoner might fly; and, as Antipas's conduct seemed to him equivocal, he posted sentinels at the gates, along the walls, and in the court-yard.

Then he went to his apartment. The deputations of priests attended him.

Each one set forth his grievances

without broaching the question of the office of sacrificer.

One and all importuned him. He dismissed them.

Jonathas left him when he saw on the battlements Antipas talking with a man with long hair and in a white robe—an Essene; and he regretted having upheld him.

One thought afforded the Tetrarch consolation. Iaokanann was no longer at his disposal, the Romans had taken charge of him. What a relief! Phanuel was walking on the path around the battlements. He called him and said, pointing to the soldiers:

"They are stronger than I! I cannot set him free; it is not my fault!"

The court-yard was empty. The slaves were at rest. Against the reddening sky, flame-coloured on the horizon, the

smallest perpendicular objects were outlined in black. Antipas distinguished the salt-wells at the far end of the Dead Sea, and he no longer saw the tents of the Arabs. Doubtless they had gone. The moon rose; a feeling of peace descended upon his heart.

Phanuel, overwhelmed, stood with his chin upon his breast. At last he made known what he had to say.

Since the beginning of the month he had studied the sky before dawn, the constellation Perseus being at the zenith. Agalah was hardly visible, Algol shone less brightly, Mira-Cœti had disappeared, whence he augured the death of a man of mark, that very night, in Machærus.

Who? Vitellius was too well guarded. Iaokanann would not be executed. "Then it is I!" thought the Tetrarch.

Perhaps the Arabs would return. The Proconsul might discover his relations with the Parthians! Hired assassins from Jerusalem escorted the priests; they had daggers under their garments, and the Tetrarch did not doubt Phanuel's learning.

He conceived the idea of having recourse to Herodias. He hated her, however. But she would give him courage, and all the bonds were not broken of the spell she had formerly cast upon him.

When he entered her chamber, cinnamon was smouldering in a bowl of porphyry; and powders, unguents, fabrics like clouds, embroideries lighter than feathers, were scattered about.

He did not mention Phanuel's prediction, or his dread of the Jews and Arabs; she would have accused him of

cowardice. He spoke of the Romans only. Vitellius had confided to him none of his military projects. He supposed him to be a friend of Caius, with whom Agrippa consorted, and he would be sent into exile, or perhaps he would be murdered.

Herodias, with indulgent contempt, tried to encourage him. At last she took from a small casket a curious medallion adorned with Tiberius's profile. That was enough to make the lictors turn pale and to base accusations upon.

Antipas, touched with gratitude, asked her how she had obtained it.

"It was given me," she replied.

Beneath a portière opposite, a bare arm protruded, a lovely, youthful arm, that might have been carved in ivory by Polycletus. Somewhat awkwardly, and yet with grace, it felt about in the

air, trying to grasp a tunic left upon a stool near the wall.

An old woman silently passed it to her, pulling aside the curtain.

The Tetrarch remembered the face, but could not place it.

"Is that slave yours?"

"What matters it to you?" replied Herodias.

III

THE guests filled the banquet-hall.

It had three naves, like a basilica, separated by pillars of algum wood, with bronze capitals covered with carvings. Two galleries with openwork balustrades overhung it; and a third, in gold filagree, jutted out at one end, opposite an immense arch.

Candelabra burning on long tables extending the whole length of the hall

formed bushes of fire, between cups of pointed clay and copper platters, cubes of snow and heaps of grapes; but those red gleams one after another were lost in space because of the height of the ceiling, and points of light twinkled, like the stars at night, through the branches. Through the opening of the vast arch, one could see torches on the terraces of the houses; for Antipas feasted his friends, his subjects, and all who had presented themselves.

Slaves, as active as dogs, and with their feet encased in sandals of felt, went to and fro, carrying salvers.

The proconsular table stood upon a platform built of sycamore boards, beneath the gilded tribune. Tapestries from Babylon enclosed it in a sort of pavilion.

Three ivory couches, one opposite the

door and one on either side, held Vitellius, his son, and Antipas; the Proconsul being next the door, at the left, Aulus at the right, the Tetrarch in the centre.

Antipas wore a heavy black cloak, whose texture was invisible beneath layers of dye-stuffs; he had paint on his cheek-bones, his beard trimmed like a fan, and azure powder on his hair, surmounted by a diadem of precious stones. Vitellius retained his purple baldric, which he wore diagonally over a linen tunic. Aulus had the sleeves of his robe of violet silk, shot with silver, tied at his back. The long spiral curls of his hair formed terraces, and a necklace of sapphires sparkled on his breast, which was as plump and white as a woman's. Beside him on a mat, with legs crossed, sat a very beautiful boy, who smiled inces-

santly. He had seen him in the kitchen, could not live without him, and having difficulty in remembering his Chaldean name, called him simply the "Asiatic." From time to time he stretched himself out on the triclinium. Then his bare feet overlooked the assemblage.

On one side there were the priests and officers of Antipas, people from Jerusalem, the chief men of the Greek cities; and, under the Proconsul, Marcellus with the publicans, friends of the Tetrarch, the notables of Cana, Ptolemais, and Jericho; then, mingled pell-mell, mountaineers from Libanus and Herod's old soldiers (twelve Thracians, a Gaul, two Germans), gazelle-hunters, Idumean shepherds, the Sultan of Palmyra, seamen of Eziongeber. Each person had before him a cake of soft dough, on which to wipe his fingers; and

their arms, stretching out like vultures' necks, seized olives, pistachioes, and almonds. All the faces beamed with joy beneath crowns of flowers.

The Pharisees had spurned them as Roman wantonness. They shuddered when they were sprinkled with galburnum and incense, a compound reserved for the use of the Temple.

Aulus rubbed his armpits with it; and Antipas promised him a whole cargo, with three bales of that genuine balsam which caused Cleopatra to covet Palestine.

A captain of his garrison at Tiberias, recently arrived, took his place behind him, to tell him of extraordinary events. But his attention was divided between the Proconsul and what was being said at the neighbouring tables.

The talk was of Iaokanann and men

of his type; Simon of Gittoy purged sin with fire. A certain Jesus——

"The worst of all!" cried Eleazar. "An infamous juggler!"

Behind the Tetrarch a man arose, as pale as the hem of his chlamys. He descended from the platform and addressed the Pharisees:

"False! Jesus does miracles!"

Antipas would fain see one.

"You should have brought Him hither! Tell us."

Then he told that he, Jacob, having a daughter who was sick, had betaken himself to Capernaum, to implore the Master to heal her. The Master had replied: "Return to thy home, she is healed!"—and he had found her in the doorway, having left her bed when the hand of the dial marked three o'clock, the very moment when he had accosted Jesus.

Of course, argued the Pharisees, there are devices, powerful herbs! Sometimes, even there, at Machærus, one found the *baaras*, which made men invulnerable; but to cure without seeing or touching was an impossibility, unless Jesus employed demons.

And the friends of Antipas, the chief men of Galilee, repeated, shaking their heads:

"Demons, clearly."

Jacob, standing between their table and that of the priests, held his peace, with a haughty yet gentle bearing.

They called upon him to speak,—"Explain His power."

He bent his shoulders, and in an undertone, slowly, as if afraid of himself:

"Know you not that He is the Messiah?"

All the priests glanced at one another,

and Vitellius inquired the meaning of the word. His interpreter waited a full minute before replying.

They called by that name a liberator who should bring to them the enjoyment of all their goods and power over all peoples. Some indeed maintained that two should be expected. The first would be vanquished by Gog and Magog, demons of the North; but the other would exterminate the Prince of Evil; and for ages they had expected His coming every minute.

The priests having taken counsel together, Eleazar spoke for them.

First, the Messiah would be a Son of David, not of a carpenter. He would confirm the Law; this Nazarene assailed it; and—a yet stronger argument—He was to be preceded by the coming of Elias.

Jacob retorted:

"But Elias has come!"

"Elias! Elias!" echoed the multitude, even to the farthest end of the hall.

All, in imagination, saw an old man beneath a flock of ravens, the lightning shining upon an altar, idolatrous pontiffs cast into raging torrents; and the women in the tribunes thought of the widow of Zarephath.

Jacob wearied himself repeating that he knew him! He had seen him! And so had the people!

"His name?"

Whereupon he shouted with all his strength:

"Iaokanann!"

Antipas fell backward as if stricken full in the chest. The Sadducees leaped upon Jacob. Eleazar harangued, seeking to obtain an audience.

When silence was restored, he folded his cloak about him and propounded questions, like a judge.

"Since the prophet is dead——"

Murmurs interrupted him. It was believed that Elias had disappeared only.

He angrily rebuked the multitude, and asked, continuing his inquiry:

"Think you that he has come to life again?"

"Why not?" said Jacob.

The Sadducees shrugged their shoulders; Jonathas, half closing his little eyes, forced himself to laugh, like a clown. Nothing could be more absurd than the claim of the body to life everlasting; and he declaimed, for the Proconsul's benefit, this line from a contemporary poet:

Nec crescit, nec post mortem durare videtur.

But Aulus was leaning over the edge of the triclinium, his forehead bathed in sweat, green of face, his hands on his stomach.

The Sadducees feigned deep emotion —on the morrow the office of sacrificer was restored to them; Antipas made parade of despair; Vitellius remained impassive. None the less his suffering was intense; with his son he would lose his fortune.

Aulus had not finished vomiting when he wished to eat again.

"Give me some marble-dust, schist from Naxos, sea-water, no matter what! Suppose I should take a bath?"

He crunched snow; then, after hesitating between a Commagene stew and pink blackbirds, he decided upon gourds with honey. The Asiatic stared at him, that faculty of absorbing food

denoting a prodigious being of a superior race.

Bulls' kidneys were served, also dormice, nightingales, and minced-meat on vine leaves; and the priests disputed concerning the resurrection. Ammonius, pupil of Philo the Platonist, deemed them stupid, and said as much to Greeks who laughed at the oracles. Marcellus and Jacob had come together. The first described to the second the bliss he had felt during his baptism by Mithra, and Jacob urged him to follow Jesus. Wines made from the palm and the tamarisk, wines of Safed and of Byblos, flowed from amphoræ into crateres, from crateres into drinking-cups, from drinking-cups down thirsty throats; there was much talk, and hearts overflowed. Jacim, although a Jew, did not conceal his adoration of the planets.

A merchant of Aphaka stupefied the nomads by detailing the wonders of the Temple of Hierapolis: and they asked how much the pilgrimage would cost. Others clung to their native religion. A German, almost blind, sang a hymn in praise of that promontory of Scandinavia where the gods appeared with halos about their faces; and men from Sichem refused to eat turtle-doves, from respect for the dove Azima.

Many talked, standing in the centre of the hall, and the vapour of their breaths, with the smoke of the candles, made a fog in the air. Phanuel passed along the wall. He had been studying the firmament anew, but he did not approach the Tetrarch, dreading the drops of oil, which, to the Essenes, were a great pollution.

Blows rang out against the gate of the castle.

It was known now that Iaokanann was held a prisoner there. Men with torches ascended the path; a black mass swarmed in the ravine; and they roared from time to time:

"Iaokanann! Iaokanann!"

"He disturbs everything!" said Jonathas.

"We shall have no money left if he continues!" added the Pharisees.

And recriminations arose:

"Protect us!"

"Let us make an end of him!"

"You abandon the religion!"

"Impious as the Herods!"

"Less so than you!" retorted Antipas.

"It was my father who built your temple!"

Thereupon the Pharisees, the sons

of the proscribed, the partisans of the Mattathiases, accused the Tetrarch of the crimes of his family.

They had pointed skulls, bristling beards, weak and evil hands, or flat noses, great round eyes, and the expression of a bulldog. A dozen or more, scribes and servants of the priests, fed upon the refuse of holocausts, rushed as far as the foot of the platform, and with knives threatened Antipas, who harangued them, while the Sadducees listlessly defended him. He spied Mannæus and motioned him to go, Vitellius signifying by his expression that these things did not concern him.

The Pharisees, remaining on their triclinia, worked themselves into a demoniacal frenzy. They broke the dishes before them. They had been

served with the favourite stew of Mæcenas—wild ass—unclean meat.

Aulus mocked at them on the subject of the ass's head, which they held in honour, it was said, and indulged in other sarcasms concerning their antipathy for pork. Doubtless it was because that vulgar beast had killed their Bacchus; and they were too fond of wine, since a golden vine had been discovered in the Temple.

The priests did not understand his words. Phineas, by birth a Galilean, refused to translate them. Thereupon Aulus's wrath knew no bounds, the more as the Asiatic, seized with fright, had disappeared; and the repast failed to please him, the dishes being commonplace, not sufficiently disguised! He became calmer when he saw tails of Syrian sheep, which are bundles of fat.

The character of the Jews seemed hideous to Vitellius. Their god might well be Moloch, whose altars he had noticed along the road; and the sacrifices of children recurred to his mind, with the story of the man whom they were mysteriously fattening. His Latin heart rose in disgust at their intolerance, their iconoclastic frenzy, their brutish stagnation. The Proconsul wished to go, Aulus refused.

His robe fallen to his hips, he lay behind a heap of food, too replete to take more, but persisting in not leaving it.

The excitement of the people increased. They abandoned themselves to schemes of independence. They recalled the glory of Israel. All the conquerors had been punished: Antigonus, Crassus, Varus.

"Villains!" exclaimed the Proconsul; for he understood Syriac; his interpreter simply gave him time to compose his replies.

Antipas quickly drew the medallion of the Emperor, and, watching him tremblingly, held it with the image towards him.

Suddenly the panels of the golden tribune opened; and in the brilliant blaze of candles, between her slaves and festoons of anemone, Herodias appeared—on her head an Assyrian mitre held in place on her brow by a chin-piece; her hair fell in spiral curls over a scarlet peplum, slit along the sleeves. With two stone monsters, like those that guard the treasure of the Atrides, standing against the door, she resembled Cybele flanked by her lions; and from the balus-

trade above Antipas, she cried, patera in hand:

"Long life to Cæsar!"

This homage was echoed by Vitellius, Antipas, and the priests.

But there came to them from the lower end of the hall a hum of surprise and admiration. A young girl had entered.

Beneath a bluish veil that concealed her breast and her head could be seen her arched eyebrows, the sards at her ears, the whiteness of her skin. A square of variegated silk covered her shoulders and was secured about her hips by a golden girdle. Her black drawers were embroidered with mandrakes, and she tapped the floor indolently with tiny slippers of humming-birds' feathers.

When she reached the platform, she removed her veil. It was Herodias, as

she was in her youth. Then she began to dance.

Her feet passed, one before the other, to the music of a flute and a pair of crotala. Her rounded arms seemed to beckon some one, who always fled. She pursued him, lighter than a butterfly, like an inquisitive Psyche, like a wandering soul, and seemed on the point of flying away.

The funereal notes of the gingras succeeded the crotala. Prostration had followed hope. Her attitudes signified sighs, and her whole person a languor so intense that one knew not whether she was weeping for a god or dying of joy in his embrace. Her eyes half closed, she writhed and swayed with billowy undulations of the stomach; her bosoms quivered, her face remained impassive, and her feet did not stop.

Vitellius compared her to Mnester the pantomimist. Aulus was vomiting again. The Tetrarch lost himself in a dream and thought no more of Herodias. He fancied that he saw her near the Sadducees. The vision faded away.

It was not a vision. She had sent messengers, far from Machærus, to Salome her daughter, whom the Tetrarch loved; and it was an excellent scheme. She was sure of him now!

Then it was the frenzy of love that demanded to be satisfied. She danced like the priestesses of the Indies, like the Nubian girls of the Cataracts, like the Bacchantes of Lydia. She threw herself in all directions, like a flower beaten by the storm. The jewels in her ears leaped about, the silk on her back shone with a changing gleam; from her arms, from her feet, from her

garments invisible sparks flashed and set men aflame. A harp sang; the multitude replied with loud applause. By stretching her legs apart, without bending her knees, she stooped so low that her chin touched the floor; and the nomads, accustomed to abstinence, the Roman soldiers, experts in debauchery, the miserly publicans, the old priests soured by disputes, all, distending their nostrils, quivered with desire.

Then she danced about Antipas's table, in a frenzy of excitement, like a witch's rhombus; and in a voice broken by sobs of lust he said: "Come! come!" She danced on; the dulcimers rang out as if they would burst; the crowd roared. But the Tetrarch shouted louder than them all: "Come! come! thou shalt have Capernaum! the plain of Tiberias! my citadels! half of my kingdom!"

She threw herself on her hands, heels in the air, and thus circled the platform like a huge scarab, then stopped abruptly.

Her neck and her vertebræ were at right angles. The coloured skirts that enveloped her legs, falling over her shoulders like a rainbow, framed her face a cubit from the floor. Her lips were painted, her eyebrows intensely black, her eyes almost terrible, and drops of sweat on her forehead resembled steam on white marble.

She did not speak. They gazed at each other.

There was a snapping of fingers in the tribune. She went thither, reappeared, and, lisping a little, uttered these words with an infantine air:

"I want you to give me, on a charger, the head—" She had forgotten the

name, but she continued with a smile: "The head of Iaokanann!"

The Tetrarch sank back, overwhelmed.

He was bound by his word, and the people were waiting. But the death that had been predicted to him, should it befall another, might avert his own. If Iaokanann were really Elias, he could escape it; if he were not, the murder would be of no importance.

Mannæus was at his side and understood his purpose.

Vitellius recalled him to give him the countersign of the sentinels guarding the moat.

It was a relief. In a moment all would be over.

But Mannæus was hardly prompt in the execution of his functions.

He reappeared, but greatly perturbed.

For forty years he had filled the post

of executioner. He it was who had drowned Aristobulus, strangled Alexander, burned Mattathias alive, beheaded Zosimus, Pappus, Josephus, and Antipater, and he dared not kill Iaokanann! His teeth chattered, his whole body trembled.

He had seen in front of the hole the Great Angel of the Samaritans, all covered with eyes, and brandishing an enormous sword, red and jagged like a flame. Two soldiers brought forward as witnesses could confirm him.

They had seen nothing save a Jewish captain, who had rushed upon them and who had ceased to live.

The frantic rage of Herodias burst forth in a torrent of vulgar and murderous abuse. She broke her nails on the gilded grating of the tribune, and the two carved lions seemed to

bite at her shoulders and to roar with her.

Antipas imitated her, so did the priests, the soldiers, the Pharisees, all demanding vengeance; and others indignant that their pleasure was delayed.

Mannæus went forth, hiding his face.

The guests found the time of waiting even longer than before. They were bored.

Suddenly the sound of footsteps echoed in the corridors. The suspense became intolerable.

The head entered; and Mannæus held it by the hair, at arm's length, proud of the applause.

When he had laid it on a charger, he offered it to Salome. She ran lightly up to the tribune; some moments later the head was brought back by the same old woman whom the Tetrarch had

noticed that morning on the roof of a house, and later in Herodias's chamber.

He recoiled to avoid looking at it. Vitellius cast an indifferent glance upon it.

Mannæus went down from the platform and exhibited it to the Roman captains, then to all those who were eating in that part of the hall.

They examined it.

The sharp blade of the instrument, cutting downward, had touched the jaw. The corners of the mouth were drawn aside convulsively. Blood, already clotted, studded the beard. The closed eyelids were of a leaden hue, like shells; and the candelabra all about shone upon it.

It reached the priests' table. A Pharisee turned it over curiously, and Mannæus, having turned it back again,

placed it in front of Aulus, who was awakened by it. Through their partly opened lids the dead eyes and the lifeless eyes seemed to speak to each other.

Then Mannæus presented it to Antipas. Tears flowed down the Tetrarch's cheeks.

The torches were extinguished. The guests took their leave, and Antipas alone remained in the hall, his hands pressed against his temples, still gazing at the severed head; while Phanuel, standing in the centre of the great nave, muttered prayers with outstretched arms.

At the moment when the sun rose, two men, previously despatched by Iaokanann, returned with the long-awaited answer.

They confided it to Phanuel, who was enraptured by it.

Then he showed them the sorrowful object on the charger, amidst the remnants of the feast. One of the men said to him:

"Be comforted! He has gone down among the dead to announce the Christ's coming!"

The Essene understood now the words: "That He may grow great, I must needs shrink."

And all three, having taken the head of Iaokanann, went forth in the direction of Galilee.

As it was very heavy, they carried it each in turn.

1876.

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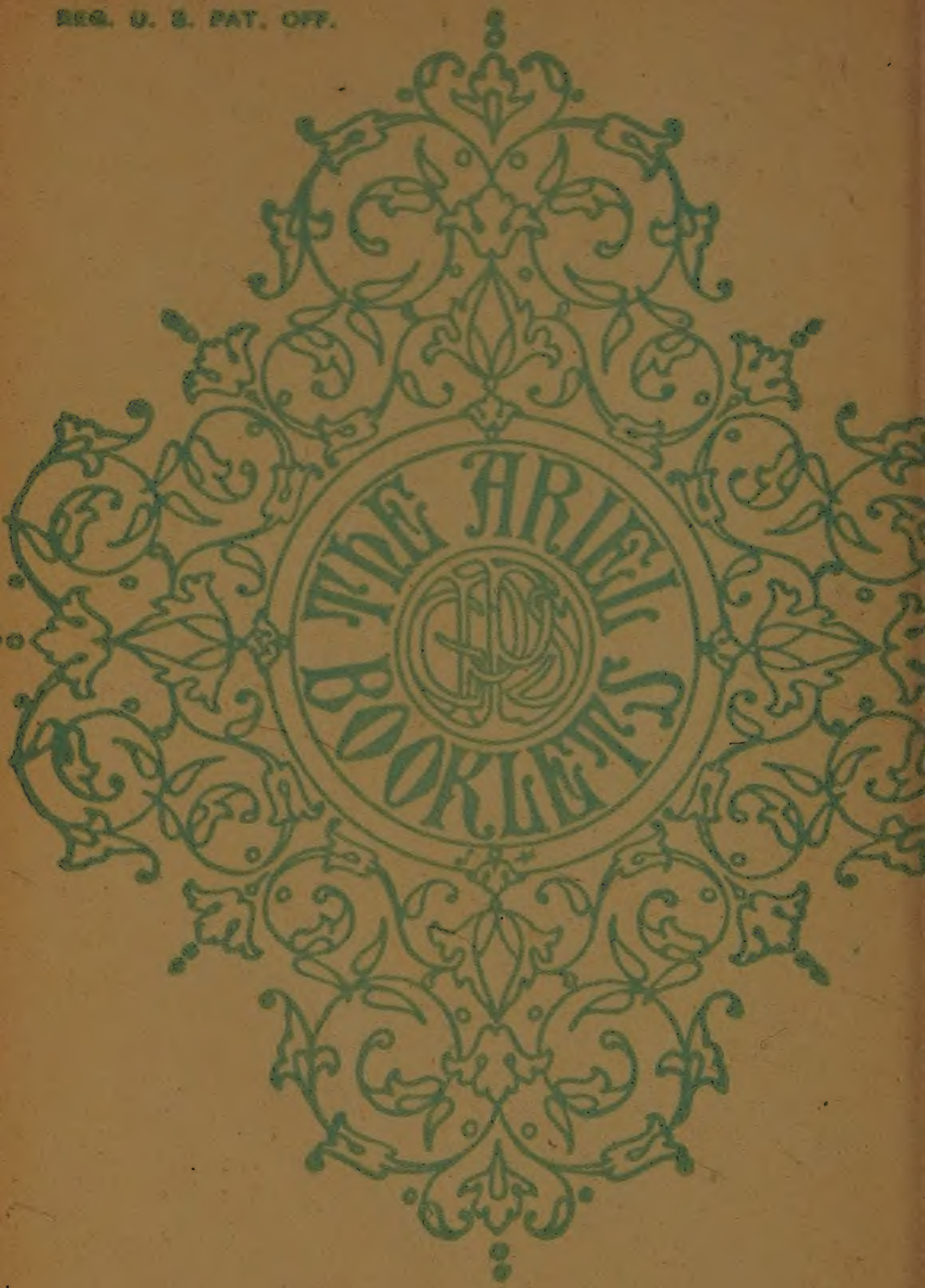

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